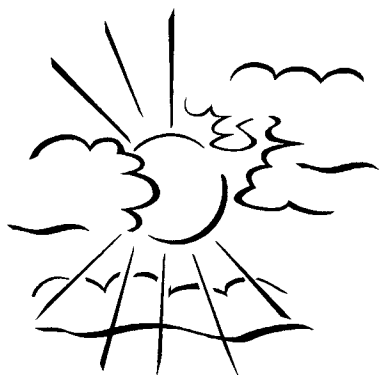


***Department
of
Human
Services***

Prepared by the
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Communications
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*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, December 6, 2005

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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REPORT NO. 233 VOLUME 44 MONDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2005

GRANHOLM SAYS WELFARE LIMIT SHOULD ONLY APPLY TO SOME

A 48-month time limit on cash welfare benefits is appropriate for those with “no barriers to self-sufficiency” but should not apply to those people who have not yet achieved that ability, Governor Jennifer Granholm said in a letter to a key senator.

Ms. Granholm sent a letter on Friday to Sen. Bill Hardiman (R-Kentwood) saying time limits “would simply serve to harm those most in need,” which would include those caring for children, those with medical conditions that block employment and those completing training to get a job.

Ms. Granholm said time limits are “not appropriate for those who are working but have not achieved self-sufficiency, or for those vulnerable populations who have a barrier to employment.”

She sent her letter to Mr. Hardiman the same day a group of 15 social services organizations, including the Michigan Catholic Conference and the Michigan League for Human Services, called on her to reconsider her support for overall time limits on welfare limits for able-bodied adults. In a letter to Ms. Granholm, the agencies said her surprising support of those limits has made it more difficult for them to try to negotiate a longer benefit period.

In response to Granholm letter, Mr. Hardiman said it seemed like Ms. Granholm was attempting to clarify her position but in doing so, did not succeed. Ms. Granholm’s support for the 48-month time limit, announced last week came as a shock to Mr. Hardiman, but he said he took her words at face value.

Mr. Hardiman said he was troubled by her use of the exemption for able-bodied adults who have “barrier to employment” because if someone is able-bodied and has no barriers they should not be on the welfare system in the first place, basically meaning that any population could be seen as having a barrier to employment.

While the federal welfare reform changes of 1996 placed a 60-month lifetime limit for able-bodied persons to receive benefits, the state did not impose any time limit, using state funds to pay coverage for those who would lose federal coverage.

With Michigan’s current welfare system scheduled to end at the close of 2005, the Legislature is now debating bills to change the state’s welfare system. While the basic limit for an able-bodied adult who has met minimum education requirements under the bills is 48 months, the Senate version of the proposal would allow a person to apply for continued basic cash assistance for an additional 12 months.

Last week, Ms. Granholm surprised many when she said she could support a 48-month limit on benefits for able-bodied adults. Later, Senate Democrats said Ms. Granholm backed their proposal to give the Department of Human Services authority to grant extensions of benefits beyond the total possible 60 months.

That proposal failed, although Republicans said they may be willing to look at it again as they look to complete work on the bills (SB 892, SB 893, SB 894, HB 5438, HB 5439, HB 5440, HB 5441, HB 5442, HB 5443, HB 5444, HB 5445 and HB 5446) which need second house approval.

In the letter to Ms. Granholm, sent on Friday, the 15 groups said they were disappointed by Ms. Granholm's support of the time limits. It is unclear, the letter said, if able-bodied adults would be the only individuals affected by time limits.

Those time limits put at "significant risk" an estimated 36,000 children, the letter said. "You articulated this very danger when the House proposed these restrictive time limits as an alternative to your executive budget recommendations earlier in the year. Your administration advocated aggressively against adoption of such policies," the letter said.

"Your statements this week have severely hindered our advocacy efforts as we seek to protect the safety and dignity of the vulnerable families you also have committed to protect," the letter said.

"We urge you to examine carefully the policies being debated and make it very clear to those in the Legislature who seek punitive approaches to changes in our welfare system that this is not the appropriate course for Michigan," the letter concludes.

After noting the exemptions that should apply to time limits, Ms. Granholm's letter to Mr. Hardiman also said, "I do believe, however, that if there are able-bodied people with no barriers to self-sufficiency currently left in our welfare system, that 48 months should be enough time to get back on one's feet."

She concluded her letter saying she looked forward to crafting a solution that helps individuals both gain financial independence and provide a strong safety net for the state's most vulnerable citizens.

Other groups signing the letter to Ms. Granholm were the Cass Corridor Neighborhood Development Corporation, Michigan Association of Infant Mental Health, Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education, Michigan Coalition for Children and Families, Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health, Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency, Michigan Fair Budget Action Coalition, Michigan Legal Services, Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, Michigan's Children, University Community Housing Coalition, St. Vincent Catholic Charities and Westside Mothers Welfare Rights Organization.

MIRS

December 5, 2005

Granholt Describes Her 48-Month Support

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** told Sen. Bill **HARIDMAN** (R-Kentwood) on Friday in a letter that she supports a 48-month lifetime welfare benefit limit for able-bodied people, but she questions how many recipients actually meet her definition of "able-bodied."

Hardiman, chairman of the Families and Human Services Committee, is the point-person of the Welfare reform bill, SB 0893, sponsored by Sen. Alan **CROPSEY** (R-DeWitt). The legislation says an able-bodied person can only receive a lifetime total of 48-months of welfare benefits.

In her letter, Granholt said the limits would not be appropriate for "those who are working, but have not achieved self-sufficiency or for those vulnerable populations who have a barrier to employment."

She classified the "vulnerables" as "those in poverty caring for children, those completing training that will lead to secure employment or those living with a medical condition that prevents employment."

SB 0893 does include exemptions for vulnerable populations and allows a 12-month extension for those who, themselves, are not disabled but continue to have trouble getting on their feet.

Most of the people in the welfare system would not fall under the classification of able-bodied, said Marianne **UDOW**, director for the Department of Human Services (DHS).

"The reality is there are very few (able-bodied) people in the system today," Udow said. "The vast amount are single mothers and children, so not very many fall into this category."

When asked if the DHS supported the bills, Udow said they liked some of the reforms — increasing education, increased training — but only referred to the governor's letter when asked if she agreed with the whole package.

Representatives from the DHS and Department of Community Health (DCH) have expressed concern about the lifetime limit before Hardiman's committee. Before bringing the bill before the whole Senate last Thursday, the committee added an amendment that included exemptions and a 12-month extension in some circumstances.

The package passed the Senate and will move to the House.

"There's a number of issues that we're working through on the bill," Udow said.

Press Secretary Liz **BOYD** said DHS and the governor's office are "on the same page" on the issue, despite rumors that Granholt's position on the 48-month issue was news to Udow when

she first heard it on the radio last week.

"The Governor believes that if there are able-bodied people with no barriers to self-sufficiency currently left in our welfare system, 48 months should be enough time to get back on their feet," Boyd said. "But those limits are not appropriate for those who are working but have not achieved self-sufficiency or for those vulnerable populations who have a barrier to employment."

Advocacy Groups Say Gov 'Hindered Efforts'

Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC), Michigan League for Human Services (MLHS) and 13 additional organizations that advocate on behalf of the poor and vulnerable of Michigan told Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** in a recent letter that her support for a 48-month lifetime limits for welfare recipients "hindered" their efforts. They urged her to rescind her support for the lifetime limits.

The MLHS, for one, is hoping when the GOP legislature gets done with its so-called Welfare Reform package, that the 48-month drop-dead date for benefits is left on the cutting room floor.

"We are not in favor of the 48 month limit," said MLHS' Ann **Marshston**. "It is incredibly restrictive. We've never seen the need for the time limit in Michigan as long as people were doing what was expected of them."

But House GOP backers see the need since they've concluded some welfare recipients procrastinate and need a nudge from the state to get a job. At least that's what Rep. Jerry KOOIMAN (R-Grand Rapids) told *MIRS* last week.

The league does endorse the new training and education elements in the package, calling it desperately needed."

Marshston said, "most everybody is doing what is expected," but she does concede there are those who are not but there are already sanctions in place to deal with that.

MLHS was among the 13 groups that wrote to the governor how they were "deeply disappointed" to hear that she supported the policy change. They noted that since the sweeping welfare reform legislation in 1997 that included a 60-month time limit on federal benefits, Michigan has been left as the last safety net for the "extremely poor families."

Time limits on cash assistance benefits would place at least 36,000 children at "significant risk" if their parents could not successfully exit the public welfare system in 48 months, as currently proposed.

"Your statements this week have severely hindered our advocacy efforts as we seek to protect the safety and dignity of the vulnerable families you also have committed to protect," they wrote. "The welfare changes being considered by the Legislature are progressing very rapidly. We urge you to examine carefully the policies being debated and make it very clear to those in the Legislature who seek punitive approaches to changes in our welfare system that this is not the appropriate course for Michigan."

Those also signing the letter included: the Cass Corridor Neighborhood Development Corporation, Michigan Association for Infant Mental Health, Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education, Michigan Coalition for Children and Families, Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health, Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency, Michigan Fair Budget Action Coalition, Michigan Legal Services, Michigan Welfare Rights Organization, Michigan's Children, St. Vincent Catholic Charities, United Community Housing Coalition and Westside Mothers Welfare Rights Organization.

Welfare rules rewrite should stay flexible

Kalamazoo Gazette Editorial

Tuesday, December 6, 2005

Former President Ronald Reagan once said the best welfare program is a job.

Unfortunately, jobs are in short supply in Michigan right now.

So more than a million Michigan residents are having to rely on the next alternative -- government help in the form of health care, food stamps and other cash assistance.

In the 1990s, Gov. John Engler's welfare-to-work policy was a spectacular success. The number of people on the state's welfare rolls plummeted. The state's Department of Social Services was renamed the Family Independence Agency to better reflect the Engler administration's philosophy that welfare was supposed to be a safety net, not a lifelong hammock.

But Engler's welfare initiative was helped immensely by the state's rip-roaring economy then, when many employers were begging for people with even marginal skills.

Today there is not much demand for workers with marginal skills and little education. In Michigan's manufacturing sector, there is weak demand even for those with decades of experience on the factory floor.

The Michigan Legislature is in the process of reconciling House and Senate versions of a package of welfare reform bills. We remind these lawmakers that, with the state's economy in the doldrums and an unemployment rate of 6.1 percent, there are more Michigan residents in need of government help than there were 10 years ago, when Michigan's welfare reform laws were first passed.

Both House and Senate versions limit lifetime welfare benefits to 48 months for able-bodied recipients and offer little flexibility to accommodate individual circumstances that may force a recipient to seek assistance for longer than that. The Senate version would allow an extra year of assistance under special circumstances. The Department of Human Services -- the old Family Independence Agency renamed by the Granholm administration -- estimates 13,500 households in Michigan have been on welfare for more than four years. As many as 8,100 of them could be cut off under the rules proposed by the legislation.

Under Engler, the FIA didn't cut off benefits to recipients who were complying with work, job training and education requirements of the program. He understood that flexibility was an important component when trying to get people who have significant barriers to finding long-term work -- lack of transportation or child care, low levels of literacy, no job training -- off welfare for good.

We urge the Legislature to make certain that any rewrite of Michigan's welfare reform laws retain a level of flexibility. Even those eager and able to work have found themselves without jobs as factories shut their doors and manufacturers trim their payrolls.

And because Michigan's cyclical economy has forced many workers to rely repeatedly on public assistance in lean times, there are many households that may, over decades, exceed the proposed lifetime limit.

Proposed budget cuts in Washington, D.C., certainly are prodding state lawmakers to find ways to reduce welfare rolls. The Detroit News estimates that proposed cuts to federal social welfare

programs could cost Michigan as much as \$1 billion in Medicaid, food stamp and cash assistance.

That's at a time when some economists are predicting Michigan's unemployment rate will increase to 7.1 percent next year and to 7.6 percent in 2007.

As tempting as it may be to balance state and federal budgets by cuts to the poor and the powerless, we urge the state Legislature to include some flexibility in its rewrite of state welfare rules.

Michigan Report

December 5, 2005

CORRIGAN, UDOW URGE ACTION AGAINST BUDGET BILL

Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan and Human Services Director Marianne Udow joined friend of the court officials Monday in calling for a letter writing campaign against a federal budget bill that would cut at least \$397 million in federal funds for child support and child welfare services between now and 2010.

Ms. Corrigan and Ms. Udow urged residents to call or write their U.S. House members, particularly in the Republican caucus, to oppose the U.S. House version of a bill to address the federal deficit. Among the provisions of the bill is reducing the federal match for child support collection services to 50 percent from 66 percent under current law.

"Today I'm in very much opposition to my good friend Dave Camp on this," Ms. Corrigan, a Republican nominee to the bench, said. "These are unsustainable costs the House is trying to shift to the states."

U.S. Rep. Dave Camp (R-Midland) is chair of the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee that created the House version of the bill.

"Anybody that thinks simply cutting administrative dollars will have no effect on child support going to children doesn't understand the connection between what we do and support going to children," Ms. Udow said.

Ms. Corrigan said there are already 2,800 friend of the court workers handling cases involving nearly a third of the children in the state. And she said cuts to the federal share would likely mean cuts to that workforce.

Susan Thorman, Shiawassee County Friend of the Court director and president of the Michigan Friend of the Court Association, said the funding cut would also halt an effort to ease the garnishment process for employers. Some 70 percent of child support is collected through garnishment, and friend of the court offices are nearing a system to communicate order changes to employers electronically, a plan that is depending on federal funds to be completed.

Part of the House plan is to charge each non-custodial parent \$25 a year for the collection service, but Ms. Corrigan noted that would also require change to federal child support laws to allow states to implement the fee.

Ms. Udow said the bill also seeks to cut federal support for foster care where the foster parents are relatives of the child. She said the move would hamper efforts to keep children within their family. "It's totally in contrast to federal government recommendations in terms of foster care services," she said. "It would further move our country away from the laudable goal of trying to keep families together."

She also chastised plans to cut mental health care funds for foster children and to reduce food stamp eligibility for legal aliens.

A conference committee on the legislation (H.R. 4241) had not been named as of Monday, but legislative work was expected to be completed on the bill as early as this week.

Published December 6, 2005

Federal budget cuts may hurt state's child support services

Michigan could lose millions under plan

By Stacey Range
Lansing State Journal

Child support, visitations and hearings on parenting disputes would be in jeopardy if the state has to lay off some collection and enforcement workers under a proposed federal cut, officials said Monday.

The cut approved by the U.S. House last month would drop federal funding for states' administrative costs of the federal child support program from 66 percent to 50 percent over five years.

Michigan would lose about \$250 million under the cut. The corresponding drop in Michigan's child support collections would be about \$397 million in the first five years and \$1.2 billion over 10 years, according to projections by the Washington-based Center for Law and Social Policy, a national non-profit group working to improve the lives of low-income people

"This is a fundamental and devastating cut, and it will hurt many children in Michigan," Department of Human Services Director Marianne Udow told reporters Monday.

Udow, appointed by Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm, was joined by Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan, a Republican, in blasting the cut.

"This cut is going backward of where we need to be going," Corrigan, the court's liaison for child support and child welfare and a member of a national task force on child support, said at a news conference.

Michigan's budget problems would make it tough for state and local governments to offset the loss. Ingham County already pays nearly \$600,000 - about one-third of the administrative costs, said Don Reisig, who oversees the county Friend of the Court.

"We're tapped out," he said. "We'll have to lose some staff."

Reisig said he could be forced to lay off about 20 of the 60 workers who help an average of 250 clients every day.

Without workers to collect support and enforce agreements, officials fear many families would end up on welfare.

"This is not money put aside for college or vacations," said Susan Thorman, president of the state's Friend of the Court Association. "It's helping families survive every day."

State officials have been making strides to increase collections, a move they say would be jeopardized by this cut. A 2003 investigation by the Lansing State Journal found that more than 600,000 Michigan children were not getting their child support.

Officials didn't know how many of the state's 2,800 child support workers could be laid off as a result of the proposed cut in federal money, but Thorman said the Friend of the Court already is talking about not filling open positions and the possibility of layoffs.

The office serves almost three million people and collected \$1.4 billion last year.

The cut is part of the Deficit Reduction Act passed last month by the U.S. House to slice almost \$50 billion from the federal deficit over five years. All Democrats opposed the bill. All of Michigan's Republican delegation approved it.

The cuts were not part of a spending proposal passed by the U.S. Senate. Differences are expected to be hammered out this week in a conference committee.

The House approved the cut because it wants states to bring their administrative costs in line with available funding, said Sage Eastman, spokesman for U.S. Rep. David Camp, R-Midland, who voted for the measure.

"The federal government, as it relates to Michigan, has been doing more than its share," he said.

Corrigan and Udow urged residents to write or call their senators and representative. "This week is critical," Corrigan said. "We urge Michigan residents who care about child support or child welfare issues to get involved."

Although Corrigan and Udow criticized the proposed cuts, they wouldn't offer solutions to offset the federal deficit. They said that job is best left to Congress.

Contact Stacey Range at 377-1157 or srange@lsj.com.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Speaking out

A U.S. House-Senate conference committee is expected to meet this week to hammer out differences in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005. To tell your senator and representative what you think should be cut or preserved, call:

- Sen. Carl Levin, D-Detroit, (202) 224-6221
- Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Lansing, 203-1760
- Rep. Dave Camp, R-Midland, (800) 342-2455
- Rep. Vern Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids, (202) 225-3831
- Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Brighton, 702-8000
- Rep. Joe Schwarz, R-Battle Creek, 323-6600

NY T

Profiles in Pusillanimity

12/6

Q. When is a self-proclaimed moderate Republican lawmaker just another malleable vote?

A. When House G.O.P. leaders hold a budget-cutting showdown open after midnight for extended arm-twisting on the eve of their long holiday break.

Back home on their Thanksgiving break, spineless lawmakers were unlikely to share with their well-fed constituents the shameful result: for the lack of just two votes from the majority's vaunted "moderate" coalition, more than 200,000 poor Americans now face the loss of food stamps worth \$140 a month in nourishment.

For weeks before the vote, coalition members won national praise and hometown headlines as they held their leaders at bay, vowing unity and demanding that the poor not be punished just as another tax-cut package for the affluent was being greased for passage. Then they buckled, after winning only cosmetic changes in what remains a truly draconian package to slash beyond food stamps to Medicaid, child care and other safety-net programs for the poor. A dozen supposed moderates turned tail as aptly named floor whips tested the rebels' steel. They feared embarrassing the G.O.P. in its shabby attempts to make the debt- and deficit-

crazed Congress seem fiscally responsible. The vote was an appalling display of budget theatrics over responsible lawmaking. A number of the midnight retreaters apparently forgot that they had previously co-sponsored something called the Hunger-Free Communities Act of 2005.

More of this sham can be expected as Congress returns and the majority Republicans resume fighting among themselves while the Democrats hold fast against safety-net cuts. The moderates will stage new public "revolts," then fall in line to create more conservative victories in the final secret deal-making between the two houses.

It doesn't have to be this way.

Poverty has risen across the past four years to 37 million and counting, by the government's own measure, while the number of homeless children in public schools is at 600,000. Six years ago, one in 10 households suffered significant food shortages. That number has ballooned to one in six: more than 13 million. These are the numbers that should be driving the nation's lawmakers, not the cynical desire to carry rebellion only to the brink of victory, followed by still another last-minute cave-in by the misnamed moderates.

Complaints come out at town-hall meeting on Medicare drug program

Tuesday, December 06, 2005

By Juanita Westaby
The Grand Rapids Press

Whichever side of the pharmacy counter he's on, Phil Sweedyk doesn't like the view. As a 63-year-old, he needs to choose one of dozens of new Medicare drug programs offered. As a fill-in pharmacist, he knows the frustrated patients he will face.

"Why did you have to make this process so difficult?" he asked Peter Leonis, of the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the government entity charged with making the government plans work.

"We on the other side of the (pharmacy) counter are really going to take the heat for this," Sweedyk said during Monday's town-hall meeting at Jenison High School, sponsored by the office of U.S. Rep. Peter Hoekstra, R-Holland.

After the session, Sweedyk said he also attended a four-hour pharmacist session last month in Big Rapids. Most of the 85 pharmacists left befuddled, he said, "and we're not morons." Representatives from half a dozen insurance companies waited outside the auditorium doors to make their sales pitches.

As the 200-member Jenison audience waited for the session to begin, "I probably heard 10 people say, 'This is so complicated,'" Sweedyk added.

He's not the only one feeling that way.

Ken Dood Jr., of Grandville, said he was there on behalf of his 80-year-old father.

"I'm doing all this for him," he said. "He couldn't handle this."

Eyeing a list of the 41 plans offered in Michigan, Janis Campbell complained to Leonis about making the search for her 81-year-old mother.

"Why did they make this printing so small? I got on the Web site and I had to print it out to read it and it was 26 pages," she said.

Allendale resident Nelson Morren, 65, noted the "really truthful gap amount" in out-of-pocket expenses in the programs was a whopping \$2,850 between the baseline coverage all programs must offer and when the government pays backup catastrophic coverage.

While Leonis touted a government Web site, medicare.gov, which compares programs, as giving fairly accurate estimates of costs, 65-year-old Cliff Hulst, of Hudsonville, said, "I went on that Web site and there's a \$200 difference if you go (directly) to Humana's (insurance company) Web site."

Some seniors complained the premiums often were higher than the monthly cost of their drugs. Some said they don't take drugs but will be penalized if they don't sign up by the May 15 deadline.

"It's insurance," Leonis explained. "It's there for when you need prescription drugs."

As for the confusion, Leonis said with 42 million people to enroll, "there's a learning curve we're all getting used to."

Read article about drug plan

Kalamazoo Gazette Letters

December 6, 2005

In reference to Alice Jeffer's Nov. 23 letter, ``Medicare drug plan makes reader mad," I, too, was furious at our government mandating our enrollment in this drug plan.

I am in my late 70s, take no prescription drugs and yet am ordered to enroll or face severe penalties?

While yet steaming at this injustice imposed, I picked up my November issue of Newsweek. Skimming through the pages, one article caught my attention. It had a profound bearing on this drug enrollment situation.

Written by Robert J. Samuelson, entitled ``The Coming Drug Bust" it emphasizes the problems associated with the current plan, states it is a calamity and that changes are necessary. I suggest people buy that November issue and read the article on page 45 or check with the local library.

Jennie L. Saladin
Kalamazoo

School Officials Issue Stranger Danger Alert

Girl Says Man In Oldsmobile Approached Her

POSTED: 1:53 pm EST December 5, 2005

Officials at a Clinton Township middle school issued an alert to parents regarding a man who approached a student in a nearby neighborhood.

A girl who attends Clintondale Middle School -- located on Little Mack Avenue -- said she was approached Wednesday by a stranger, Local 4 reported. The girl said the man drove up to her in a burgundy-colored Oldsmobile sedan, and started talking to her, Local 4 reported.

The girl was not harmed, according to the station's reports.

Officials from Clintondale Community Schools issued a letter to parents to inform them of the incident, Local 4 reported.

Police have not located the man, who was described as white, in his 60s, with white hair and wearing silver glasses, according to Local 4.

Officers have increased patrols near the school.

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Children's Assessment Center Serves Child Victims of Sexual Abuse

Created: 12/4/2005 6:46:39 PM

Updated: 12/5/2005 8:13:53 AM

WZZM – Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids - A Grand Rapids man charged with child sexual abuse will appear in court in a little more than a week. Thirty-three year old daycare co-owner Khristopher Cross is charged with multiple counts of criminal sexual conduct. Cross was arraigned on the latest charges Friday. His next court date is December 14th.

That's just one child sexual abuse case WZZM 13 followed recently. Another case could cost parents custody of their adopted kids after allegations of sexual abuse between children.

One organization has played a role in both investigations. The Children's Assessment Center has resources available for any children who may have been abused.

A parent's nightmare became reality for some families recently. But there are places to turn if you fear your child may have been sexually abused.

The Children's Assessment Center of Kent County provides services for sexually abused children, ranging from assessment of whether or not abuse took place, to counseling. Interviewer Becky Yuncker says, "I think it's really important for parents to understand, we're here to help assist them. We're here to help them protect their kids."

Children's Assessment Center Executive Director Deirdre Toeller-Novak says the center already received more than a dozen calls from parents concerned about the daycare center co-owned by alleged child-molester Khristopher Cross. Toeller-Novak says, "Those parents may call here, they can meet with our assessment counselor, who will meet with them, meet with the child."

Grand Rapids Detective Dan Adams says parents can look for red flag behaviors. His office, as well as that of several other detectives, and Child Protective Service workers is located at the Children's Assessment Center so they can work smoothly together. He encourages parents to "pay attention to what's going on with the child, changes in behavior, changes in bathroom habits and sleeping habits and eating habits."

If a child has been sexually abused, the Children's Assessment Center can help the child heal, in a comfortable environment. Toeller-Novak says, "We are all here, so the child does not need to go to the police department to be interviewed. They don't have to go to an emergency room. And they're interviewed once by the team and by a trained interviewer, not several times."

While it may be difficult to report child sexual abuse, Toeller-Novak says in the long run, it's

better for everyone. She explains, "If a child is sexually assaulted and not treated, we know that more than half of those children end up in the juvenile justice system. We know that they turn to alcohol and substance abuse. They become sexually promiscuous. A few of them may even become abusers themselves." On the other hand, Toeller-Novak says, "When parents are afraid of retraumatizing the children, it really is a misplaced fear. The most productive thing, the helpful thing for a child is to let that healing happen."

The work of the Children's Assessment Center starts with a simple assessment of whether the child has been abused or not. Toeller-Novak says, "Sometimes we see a parent, because a child is exhibiting sexualized behaviors, and it may just be normal sexual behavior." If the behavior is determined to be normal the family can be educated on certain body safety and awareness issues.

But, if interviewers determine a child may have been sexually abused, specially trained interviewer Becky Yuncker steps in. She talks with the child in a specially designed interview room, to make the child comfortable. She says, "We try to keep it child friendly. But, it's not a therapy room, it's not a playroom. you'll notice there's not a lot of toys. So, when we're talking with kids it's important they realize this is our talking room. We're not here to engage in fantasy, we're not here to engage in play." Yuncker asks the child questions while detectives, child protective service workers, or other investigators watch from behind a one way mirror.

Detective Dan Adams of the Grand Rapids Police Department says, "This way we have one interview, and everybody who needs to hear that interview can observe that one interview, and the child only has to tell the story one time."

Children can also have a medical examination at the Children's Assessment Center, with Doctor Debra Simms. She says, "We do nothing here that is painful. There's not a needle in this whole place. We let them know that." Simms does look for signs of injury with specialized equipment that can magnify small scars or injuries. Dr. Simms also checks for sexually transmitted diseases. But, she says the most important thing is reassurance. She says, "To know that their body's okay. To know that their body's normal. To know that what happened to them was not their fault."

The Children's Assessment Center is planning an information session for parents who think their child may be the victim of sexual abuse. For more information you can call (616) 336-5160.

Our View: Court improvements welcomed

Midland Daily News

12/04/2005

Being a victim of abuse is tough enough. For some, the prospect of facing an abuser in court is enough cause to keep silent – sad but true.

Now imagine being a child in a courtroom, having to testify about abuse at the hands of an adult who sits just yards away.

In Midland County, that's not happening anymore.

Recent renovations and a new camera system in the Midland County Probate Court mean that when a child testifies, he or she can see only the judge or the attorney asking questions. The first time it was used, the accused was the victim's mother, who commented during the child's testimony. With the new system, those comments never reached the child. The camera system also can be used for district court, so children can testify without entering those courtrooms.

There are a few other advantages, as well, such as digital recordings, better presentation options and improved safety for the probate court judge. The largest part, though, is geared toward our smallest citizens.

For too long, abused children have been victimized again when they get to court. We are proud that in Midland County, that has ended.

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Letters for December 6

The Grand Rapids Press

Tuesday, December 06, 2005

Don't forget kids in welfare equation

Teg Baxter's letter truly made me mad ("Trapped by bad decisions," Pulse, Nov. 28), so I have a few questions.

Is the purpose of welfare to feed adults or children? Are children involved in the good or bad decision to be created?

Can children provide food, clothing, medical care and shelter for themselves? Should "poor houses" be reinstated? Is punishing a child for the sins of the parent a good thing? Should this idea be transferred to all governmental sanctions (jail time, fines, etc.)?

These, and many other, questions are often ignored in the race to impose morality upon society. Bad decisions by one person should not be held against an innocent child.

We, as a society, are the biggest losers when we allow children to go hungry, to be ill-clothed, to live in decrepit hovels, and to be in need of routine medical care for political goals. Growing up hopeless leads to more hopelessness and counterproductive choices.

If society does not provide easy access to a way out of despair, then the choices tend to reflect that despair and lack of hope. Highlighting the occasional winner of the poverty roulette who manages to struggle out of bad schools, hunger and poverty ignores all those who are left behind. I believe our nation is bigger than this. We can help the least among us even if it means helping those who are undeserving.

It makes us better and takes us one step closer to being "...that shining city on a hill."

We should all deeply reflect upon the choices our society makes and make certain that they reflect our highest ideals of compassion and generosity for those least able to help themselves.

TED BERGIN/Lowell

PUBLISHED: Tuesday, December 6, 2005

Clare man arrested after standoff

By SUSAN FIELD
Clare Managing Editor

A Clare County man is charged with assault with intent to do great bodily harm after a police emergency services team was called to a home in northwestern Isabella County early Sunday morning.

Charles Bailey II is the second man in a week to allegedly hold police at bay in Isabella County. Isabella County Trial Judge William Rush charged Bailey – who is accused of threatening to kill his live-in girlfriend, Susan Flannell, and biting off part of her tongue – with the 10-year felony Monday afternoon.

Rush ordered Bailey, who reportedly has had psychological problems, to remain in the Isabella County Jail on a \$100,000 bond.

Bailey, 38, allegedly pulled a handgun on Flannell during a "heated argument" at a home in the 3000 block of West Bawkey Road in Gilmore Township Sunday, state Trooper Jim Ciochetto said.

Bailey is also accused beating, strangling and holding Flannell hostage for about four hours at the home, Ciochetto said.

Flannell told police that she escaped the home after Bailey fell asleep, police said.

During his video arraignment from the Isabella County Jail, Bailey told Rush that the home belongs to Flannell's brother.

Bailey also expressed concern because his truck, his dog and a friend's mobile home are still at the home, where Flannell is staying.

After leaving the home early Sunday morning, Flannell – who was treated for injuries and released from MidMichigan Medical Center-Clare – contacted police, telling officers that Bailey was barricaded in the home and was armed with at least one gun, police said.

Ciochetto called in the state police Emergency Support Team – a group of officers that handle dangerous and critical incidents – because Bailey was reportedly armed.

Bailey surrendered peacefully after ES officers called for him to come out of the home, police said.

After serving a search warrant, officers found and took several weapons from the home, police said.

Officers in Isabella County have dealt with two other standoff situations recently, but in both prior cases, there were suicides.

Members of the Isabella County Emergency Services Team found Norman James Labonte, 46, dead in his pickup truck at about 11:50 p.m. Nov. 28 after an Isabella County Sheriff's deputy spotted Labonte about four hours earlier in the truck, parked off West Blanchard Road between South Johnson and South Woodruff roads in Fremont Township.

Labonte – who had been sentenced earlier in the day for a second-offense drunken driving conviction – grabbed a rifle after the deputy told him to get out of the truck.

Sheriff's officers called in the local ES team because Labonte was armed.

In general, suicides and potentially violent situations increase during the holiday season, police said.

"It's that time of year," said state police Lt. Andrea Nerbonne, commander of the Mt. Pleasant post. "People get stressed, depressed.

"It's a hard time of year for some people."

Suspect faces maiming charge

Tuesday, December 06, 2005

JOE SNAPPER
THE SAGINAW NEWS

MOUNT PLEASANT -- A 38-year-old man bit off a hunk of his girlfriend's tongue after threatening to shoot her in a four-hour domestic brawl she escaped when he fell asleep, authorities claim.

The Farwell woman, 34, lost about a half-inch of her tongue. Also partly strangled, she suffered neck injuries and received outpatient treatment at a Clare hospital, state police said.

Charles Bailey II is facing a maiming charge, a 10-year felony carrying up to a \$5,000 fine. Isabella County Trial Court Judge William R. Rush on Monday set a \$100,000 bond at 10 percent, court workers said.

Seldom used by prosecutors, the charge of maiming also covers "putting out or destroying an eye, cutting or tearing off an ear, cutting or slitting or mutilating the nose or lips or cutting off or disabling a limb, organ or member," the statute reads.

Investigators on Sunday searched their home but couldn't find the tip of her tongue, troopers from the Mount Pleasant Post said.

Troopers said Bailey was a live-in boyfriend who escalated a "heated argument" Sunday by brandishing a loaded .357-caliber pistol at a home in Isabella County's Gilmore Township.

"The suspect pulled a handgun and pointed at her, threatening to kill her," troopers said. "He also strangled and beat the victim, biting off part of her tongue in this four-hour incident."

When her boyfriend dozed off, the victim slipped out and fled to police, warning them he was "mentally unstable and barricaded in the residence armed with at least one firearm."

Police cast a perimeter around the home and began amassing a SWAT team when the suspect emerged peacefully.

Bailey also faces three weapons counts and an aggravated stalking charge, court workers said. He remained jailed Monday after his video arraignment. An examination is set for Thursday in Rush's courtroom.

Joe Snapper is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9715.

Man pleads guilty to murder

Plea deal will send Fernando Roberson to prison minimum 32 years

Tuesday, December 6, 2005

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

On the morning of his murder trial, an Ypsilanti Township man tearfully admitted that he killed the mother of his children and accepted a plea deal that will send him to prison for a minimum of 32 years.

Fernando Roberson, who turned 32 on Saturday, said he snapped the morning of May 21 when he went to the Ford Lake Landing apartment of Robynn Page and shot her to death.

There was never much doubt about whether Roberson was the killer. He was arrested later that day while fleeing through Ohio, and a sheriff's detective said Roberson confessed to the crime in the Washtenaw County Jail.

A jury was seated in the Washtenaw County courtroom of Judge Melinda Morris Monday when Roberson decided not to proceed and instead accepted a plea agreement, said Daniel Geherin, Roberson's court-appointed attorney.

Through tears, Roberson pleaded guilty to second-degree murder, using a weapon to commit a felony and being a felon in possession of a firearm. A sentencing agreement calls for a minimum of 30 years for the slaying and two years on the weapons charge.

Page, 25, was the mother of four small children, and Roberson is the father of the two younger children. They're now being raised by Page's relatives, who said after the slaying that Robynn broke up with Roberson a few weeks before the shooting.

The night of the shooting, Page had friends at her apartment, and police said Roberson called repeatedly and eventually came over. As she walked down to the landing of the apartment they had previously shared, Page was shot multiple times just inside the entrance of the apartment. Roberson will be sentenced Jan. 23.

Amalie Nash can be reached at anash@annarbornews.com or (734) 994-6832.

Local News

Teen faces charge in bomb threat

By ERICA KOLASKI
Tribune Staff Writer

CHEBOYGAN - City police are seeking charges against a 13-year-old Cheboygan Middle School student after a bomb scare last week.

According to Chief Kurt Jones, director of the Cheboygan Department of Public Safety, the 13-year-old boy is facing felony charges of reporting a fictitious bomb incident.

Jones said that at around 2 p.m. Thursday, police were called to the Cheboygan Middle School after someone discovered a phone message left in a room that said a bomb had been placed in the facility.

Jones said that the school went into lockdown and had to be evacuated.

“There was a lot of school expense involved here,” said Jones. “School activities, sports practices and other events had to be canceled.”

“The biggest thing here will be the restitution,” said Jones. “We’re thinking it will be in the thousands of dollars.”

Jones said that the school incurred a number of costs as well as the expense of law enforcement resources such as a bomb-sniffing dog.

He said that officers questioned students Friday morning before petitioning the court for charges against the youth. Because of his age, the boy’s name will not be released.

“We treat this as a pretty a serious incident,” Jones said.

12-year-olds caught shoplifting

Trace Christenson

The Battle Creek Enquirer

Two 12-year-old girls likely will be placed on probation after they were caught stealing merchandise from at least seven stores at Lakeview Square Mall.

The girls were caught about 9 p.m. Friday after they were seen taking earrings from Claire's Boutiques, Battle Creek police said Monday. Officers said the girls had taken more than 30 items from at least six other stores in what is a typical case of shoplifting, one authority said.

"It's a group activity and they want what they want and it is all personal items for themselves," said Judy Campbell, executive director of the Advocates, a youth outreach program affiliated with St. Philip Catholic Church.

About 100 kids a year caught as first-time shoplifters are diverted from the criminal justice program and placed in programs operated by the Advocates.

"About 65 to 70 percent of our shoplifters are girls and only about 10 percent of them do it alone," Campbell said. "It is usually done in groups.

"And it's not just this time of the year. It's a year-round sport."

Police said the items were taken from Spencer Gifts, Sleeping Tiger Imports, Victoria's Secret, Hot Topic, One George Dollar Store, Aeropostale and Claire's Boutiques.

Items taken included lip gloss, earrings, key chains, hair items, Playboy stickers, ashtrays, thongs and bikinis, sweatpants, sweatshirts, a sexually suggestive dice game and a penis necklace. Police said it wasn't clear from which stores the girls stole some of the items.

Police said the two girls were in a group but none of the others were arrested.

Brian Maurig, assistant manager at Spencer Gifts, believes store personnel catch about 90 percent of the shoplifters, which is three or four a week this time of year. Most are young teenagers.

"They think they are cool to come in and steal a keychain," he said.

He said the problem increases during the holidays because more people are in the store "and when it gets busy, we tend to miss some. We have to keep our eye on kids when they are in large groups."

The two girls arrested were turned over to their parents and were to appear in Juvenile Court on Monday.

Mike Boltz, Juvenile Court Administrator, said they likely will be placed on probation and ordered to make restitution. If they are first-time offenders, they might be diverted by prosecutors to the Advocates. If they successfully complete the program, charges will be dropped.

Boltz said the number of retail fraud cases in Calhoun County for juveniles 16 and younger has dropped from 226 in 1998 to 147 last year, primarily because many of the kids have been diverted. In 2004, 430 charges of shoplifting were against adults.

"We had 100 last year," Campbell said of the number of kids diverted. "It was their first time caught, which is not their first time shoplifting. Most of them have shoplifted from other places and not been caught. Only about 10 percent are first timers; the rest is that it's the first time they have been caught."

Campbell said that while girls take items for their personal use, boys steal electronic items like CDs, video games, food and alcohol.

She said the Advocates program tries to instill that everyone is a victim of shoplifting because it increases the prices on all items and that people have to earn what they get.

"We tell them, 'Who do they think they are, just taking what they want?' But they want what they want when they want it."

Campbell said no first-time offenders who attend the program have been caught again.

"I guess they decide it's not worth sitting in a class once a week for six months for a \$10 T-shirt," she said.

"It is unfortunate to see kids this young involved," said Prosecutor John Hallacy. "And this is not just an issue for law enforcement but for the community. This type of behavior needs to open some eyes in the community. Why are 12-year-olds committing this type of crime and how can we change it?"

Trace Christenson covers crime and courts. He can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.

Originally published December 6, 2005

Homeless pose dilemma for Super Bowl planning What can Detroit do about panhandling?

Brad Heath / The Detroit News

DETROIT-- Edward Skipper, 33, and homeless, seems certain that as Detroit polishes its image for the Super Bowl, his isn't the face city leaders will want the region's out-of-town guests to see. "I don't see them allowing anyone to go up to people from out of town or anything like that," he said on a recent morning, sitting in the back of a 24-hour homeless shelter in one of the bleak neighborhoods north of downtown.

"They're going to be extra hard on that. They might even try to ship everyone out. I don't know." But he said he has friends who will be panhandling anyway.

Two months before the Feb. 5 Super Bowl fixes the world's eyes on Detroit, city leaders say they don't yet have a plan for the homeless who inhabit soon-to-be-bustling downtown districts.

Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's staff is scheduled to meet this week with advocacy groups, business owners and others to begin figuring out what to do.

What the city can do is far from clear. While other Super Bowl cities have set up temporary shelters and cracked down on panhandlers, neither Detroit nor the scattering of nonprofit groups that serve the homeless have much extra money to spend on accommodations.

And the city has little legal authority to expel homeless people from the area if they aren't breaking the law and don't want to leave.

"It's a touchy subject and one we have to address very cautiously," said Al Fields, Detroit's interim chief operating officer, who is coordinating the effort.

"I know panhandling is an issue, but we have to be aware of the human rights issues as well."

If the city wants to keep the homeless from panhandling around the Super Bowl and all the events leading up to it, it needs to find someplace else for them to go, said Chad Audi, chief operating officer for the Detroit Rescue Mission, one of the city's homeless shelters.

"If they want to be there hustling people, it wouldn't look too good for Detroit," Audi said. "As long as we're providing alternatives, we shouldn't have that problem."

Stan Bryson, 49, lost his apartment to a fire and doesn't have a job. He doesn't panhandle -- "hell no," he declared -- and saves what he can by passing out handbills and doing odd jobs in the city. And he knows too well the looks on the faces of people who see him on the street.

"There's an element of fear. People are scared of the homeless," he said.

"You can feel how afraid they are. It's not a good feeling."

Simply cracking down is unacceptable, Audi said. "We don't want them to be picked up from the streets and thrown away," he said. "We don't want them to be treated like criminals simply because they're homeless."

Even with tougher panhandling enforcement, the city can't banish the homeless from downtown simply for being homeless.

"You can't restrict somebody's right to association because you don't like the way they look or how much money they have," said Kary Moss, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Michigan chapter.

Detroit has seized on the Super Bowl as an opportunity to sell itself anew to the rest of the country; it has spent five years trying to shed the crumbling landmarks of its dilapidated image. The Super Bowl spotlight has been the impetus to demolish some long-neglected buildings and finally restore others in crumbling sections of downtown. The city has pushed hard for new stores and restaurants and has remade some of its main streets.

Officials say they're being cautious about how they handle the homeless during the Super Bowl because missteps could bruise the city's image -- either if panhandling is too rampant or the city's crackdown too aggressive.

"They have these problems in every city, with every game, but everyone is very fearful of the Detroit image, and we're trying oh-so-hard not to give anyone the opportunity to bash us."

Businesses have expressed concern that aggressive panhandling -- which is illegal -- could scare away customers.

"We try to be understanding with their plight, and we don't want to harass them or anything like this," said Dr. Steve Georgiou, who owns the Olympia Shish Kebab and is president of the Greektown Merchants Association.

"But we don't want them to lie down in the doorway and cause a problem for our customers. And we discourage giving money to people on the street because it frightens people when someone comes up and says give me a dollar. We want to put an end to something like that because those people might not come back downtown again."

The city's Super Bowl Host Committee is involved in the planning, but has not advocated a particular approach, its spokesman, Ken Kettenbeil, said. "We don't have a policy, we don't have a plan. It's not something we have control over," he said.

Before the last Super Bowl, nonprofit groups in Jacksonville, Fla., opened a temporary homeless shelter big enough to accommodate about 300 people. Churches donated food.

Almost immediately, there was a line to get in, said Wanda Lanier, the executive director of the Emergency Services and Homeless Coalition of Jacksonville.

She said rumors that city police swept the homeless off the streets in the days before the Super Bowl proved to be unfounded: A study found arrests of the homeless actually dropped around the time of the game. Nor did the game bring more homeless people to the area, she said, though rising prices at budget motels did leave some low-income families who had been living there with no place to stay.

The shelter closed a few days after the game.

"They had really hoped that the city would see that there was a need for a shelter and somebody would come along and say we can't close this down," she said. "People were very angry the day we had to close the doors and put them back on the street."

Pontiac doesn't want more homeless

Web-posted Dec 6, 2005

By DIANA DILLABER MURRAY
Of The Oakland Press

PONTIAC - An announcement of a \$1 million grant to build apartments for the homeless in Pontiac was not good news to a City Council trying to revitalize downtown, increase homeownership and dig the city's way out of a deficit.

Some council members say they are concerned about plans to build permanent, high-density, multihousing projects because Pontiac already has more rentals,

Advertisement

shelters and group homes than any other community in the county. Businesses have complained that homeless people milling around downtown keep customers away.

"I say instead of choosing Pontiac, why not Bloomfield or Troy ... or Auburn Hills?" said council member Susan Shoemaker, chairwoman of the housing subcommittee.

Pontiac is one of eight cities selected to share \$10 million in state and federal dollars from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority for permanent housing with supportive housing programs for its chronically homeless.

The \$1 million will go to the nonprofit agency or agencies proposing the program that best fulfills the goal of providing permanent supportive housing to the chronically homeless.

Proposals must be submitted to the development authority by Friday, said spokeswoman Mary Lou Keenon.

Shoemaker said she has learned there were proposals to build 14 apartment units in one part of the city and 12-24 town houses in another by the fall of 2006. She said Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency, one of the agencies working on the project, has suggested the units not be clustered together in the city. She said council members Kone Bowman and John Bueno, in whose districts the multiunits are proposed, will take on the issue.

"We are not saying we don't want to help, but does it have to be in our city?" Shoemaker said.

"The majority aren't from Pontiac." She also said many people released from the penal system are dropped off in Pontiac, even though they never lived in the city, because Circuit Court is the place where they were sentenced.

In addition, she said housing complexes for low-income residents, such as Lakeside homes, have been demolished because of problems that grew in the densely populated complex. Federal, state and local officials have moved to favoring single-family homes spread around cities instead.

Ron Borngesser, executive director of Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency, said he notified City Council of the proposals "so they could be aware and involved." He said discussions of how to provide permanent housing for the homeless is in preliminary stages.

He said there has been only one meeting between OLHSA, Lighthouse of Oakland County, Community Service Network and Michigan State Housing Development Commission so far.

"When it was suggested it be a concentration of housing in one spot in the city, that did concern us. We didn't know whether that would be something individuals in the community would support," said Borngesser, who said there have been some successful models around the United States.

Don Jones, who leads housing development for OLHSA, which normally builds only affordable single-family homes for low-income families, suggested the housing units be spread around and not concentrated in one area of the city.

"A lot of times, it creates a negative public reaction," Borngesser said. "It isn't good to get the whole community riled up over something until all the details are worked out. We felt uncomfortable that it didn't have the proper level of city administration involved in talking about these preliminary stages and we didn't think it should go too far until the real decision makers are involved.

"It would be nice if everyone got together in a room and talked it over," he said.

Agencies that serve the homeless, such as Baldwin Center in Pontiac and New Bethel Outreach Ministry in Pontiac, said they see a need for affordable housing for the homeless.

La-Wanda Jackson, director of the New Bethel shelter, says more help is needed.

"A lot of people lost their jobs and ran out of savings and ended up here," she said. "There is a lack of permanent affordable housing for homeless," Jackson said. "There are a lot of people on disability ... and a lot of landlords are not willing to work with them. It's a big cycle. They get housing, but what's the point, they are homeless again. If the state provides help for permanent housing, it would help," she said.

Under the program, a chronically homeless person is defined as an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for more than one year. In Michigan, it is estimated that approximately 6,000 to 8,000 men and women - approximately 15-20 percent of the total homeless population - are chronically homeless.

Woman says she posed as Hurricane Katrina victim

Catherine L. Hubler tells police her husband devised scam

Tuesday, December 6, 2005

By Tim Younkman
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

Police say, a 43-year-old woman says she lied about being a refugee from Hurricane Katrina in order to get benefits and handouts from area charitable organizations.

Catherine L. Hubler told police in a jailhouse interview that she and her husband, Terry Grumbley, 49, cooked up the scheme to defraud area agencies by claiming to have been living in Louisiana when the hurricane hit, police said. The couple said they had hitchhiked to Michigan. "We were here the whole time," she was quoted by officers as saying while being questioned voluntarily in the Bay County Jail on Saturday.

Hubler and Grumbley were jailed in lieu of \$50,000 bond each on charges of obtaining money under false pretenses. A hearing on the evidence against them is scheduled for Dec. 20 by District Judge Craig Alston.

Police said the two posed as refugees and obtained help from Created For Caring, the East Shoreline Chapter of the American Red Cross, St. Vincent de Paul Society, The Salvation Army, St. Stanislaus Catholic Church and Mid-Michigan Community Action Alliance.

A debit card from the American Red Cross provided the couple with money to pay for a hotel room, and they moved from a small motel on South Euclid Avenue to the Plaza Hotel, 501 Saginaw St., in downtown Bay City. That is where police originally talked to them and took them into custody in October.

At the time, neither of them admitted to bilking the charities of any items or cash.

But Bay City Police this week reported Hubler gave vivid details of how the scheme came about. She said Grumbley had been in jail last summer and she had moved to Houghton Lake to live, but he located her several weeks after getting out of jail on Aug. 22.

Once the hurricane hit in late August, she said, Grumbley discussed the plan to pose as refugees. She said he forced her to go along with it and that she was afraid of him because he had beaten her before.

They obtained bicycles from Created For Caring and then peddled to the Red Cross offices where they obtained further assistance after telling their story.

"It was all a lie," she said, according to police.

She said he used some cash from the debit card obtained from an ATM machine to buy crack cocaine, police said.

Investigators said they obtained the bicycles, backpacks, television set, microwave oven and vouchers for various food items and other gifts from the agencies.

- Tim Younkman covers area police agencies and courts for The Times. He can be reached at 894-9652, or by e-mail at tyounkman@bc-times.com.

FOC to shut down awhile

Tuesday, December 06, 2005

By Brian Wheeler
bwheeler@citpat.com -- 768-4928

If you make or collect child-support payments, the state of Michigan has an unwelcome gift for you this holiday season.

Jackson County's Friend of the Court office will be shut off from the statewide computer network Dec. 16-18. Officials will be able to read, but not update, cases Dec. 19.

The shutdown is part of a statewide upgrade to the system, yet local officials say there will be consequences. They warn they won't be able to do much with cases and say some child-support checks could be delayed.

"We're going to be looking at a blank (computer) screen," said Andy Crisenbery, the local office's director. "There's going to be limited things we can do."

The statewide system has been plagued with glitches since all counties began switching to it in 2003. Many have complained about checks being delayed or payment figures changing arbitrarily.

A spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services, which oversees Friends of the Court offices, said the changes should ultimately improve service.

"It's to provide for some technical fixes for the system and to do sort of an upgrade of the components," spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said.

In the short run, Crisenbery said, he's most worried that the system's four-day shutdown will mean delays in child-support payments once the system returns to action. That, he said, could cause problems, with Christmas only days away.

"Having to print that kind of volume (of checks) in one day, I don't think they'll be able to do it. Maybe they can," he said.

Monroe County's teen pregnancy rate continues decline

Monroe News

Story updated December 03. 2005 1:25AM

Teen pregnancies in Monroe County have continued to fall in recent years, reflecting a state and national trend.

Statistics show that 234 Monroe County teens were pregnant in 2003, the latest year for which figures are available. That's down 18 percent during a period when total pregnancies in the county declined by less than 1 percent.

The trend might be due to a combination of factors, experts say, including fear of AIDS, better birth control methods, lifestyle changes, a greater emphasis on abstinence and improved education and communication.

"My guess would be it has to do with better education to the teens with regards to abstinence and contraception," said Kim Comerzan, interim clinic supervisor at the Monroe County Health Department.

Better parent-teen communication is part of the rationale for Michigan's "Talk Early, Talk Often" pilot program, a series of 60 workshops held around the state to help parents open lines of communication with their teens about sex. Four of the workshops were held in Monroe County in recent days, the most recent in Whiteford on Thursday.

"Students do listen to parents and do listen to the teachers and counselors," added Terri Langton, a health education consultant at the Monroe County Intermediate School District (ISD) who helped schedule and facilitate the workshops.

Though acknowledging that popular media can influence youngsters behaviors, Ms. Langton said a teens upbringing and home environment play a large role.

"I think the media create information and awareness, but I think values come from the parents, the churches and areas such as that. I think that's where kids form their ideas. I think it goes back to what parents convey to their children."

Studies have found that parents who clearly communicate their values, express concern and love for their kids and supervise their selection of friends and role models will have youngsters less likely to get involved in any risky behavior.

The state workshops are designed to help parents become more approachable and discuss sexual questions with their teens. An underlying concept is that fewer teen pregnancies will mean fewer costs for government-funded support services.

One example: The total cost to the Medicaid system for the delivery of a baby and health care through its first year of life is estimated at \$11,528. In 2000, the state Medicaid program paid for prenatal, delivery and post-natal care for roughly 26,000 unintended births, equaling more than \$286 million in costs.

"Of course, not all unintended births involve teens. Remember that some research shows that 50 percent of all pregnancies are unplanned," says Nancy Thompson, who works with teen mothers in the Great Expectations program run by the ISD and the health department.

She also said the theory that some teens might think its cool to be pregnant isn't evident in her classes.

"Overall, I don't really believe that the majority I deal with personally had that as a plan," she said. "I think it's something that happens, and it's not intentional."

Abstinence has been a part of sex education programs in Michigan public schools for some years, and new laws now require AIDS and HIV education as well as information on safe delivery and adoption.

Ms. Langton said kids nowadays are getting much more information that makes them aware of the risks and consequences of early sexual behavior.

The most recent federal figures show that the percentage of girls 15 to 17 who had had intercourse declined from 38 percent in 1995 to 30 percent in 2002. For boys in the same age group, the decline was from 43 percent to 31 percent.

In addition, the agency said that when teens do have intercourse, 79 percent used contraception in a period covering 1991 to 2002, compared with 61 percent in the 1980s, a factor consistent with a drop in teen pregnancy.

The teen pregnancy rate is derived by combining the number of teens who give birth with estimates for abortion and miscarriage rates. The 234 teen pregnancies reported in 2003 resulted in 155 live births.

The county's decline in teen pregnancies defies population trends. The 18 percent drop in since 1999 came during a period when the number of girls 15 to 19 fell by less than a half percent. And since 1989, the teen pregnancy rate fell 38 percent while the number of teen females rose by 2.7 percent.

"I also think some of the expectations are different now," Ms. Thompson said. "In past decades, girls were expected to grow up and get married and have a baby. Now college and careers often are the priorities."

In line with national figures, more teens gave birth in Monroe County's urbanized areas than elsewhere.

For example, 11.6 percent of all births in the City of Monroe — a total of 77 babies — had teen moms. In Bedford Township, 4.9 percent of all births were to teens, and in Monroe Township, 3.3 percent of births were to teens.

Published December 4, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Gear helps kids with disabilities take first steps

Associated Press

TAYLOR - Children with multiple disabilities are learning what it feels like to walk for the first time, thanks to new equipment at a suburban Detroit therapy center.

Youngsters at the Penrickton Center for Blind Children are using an overhead transport system to get out of wheelchairs and beds, move around on their own feet and explore their surroundings, said Kurt Sebaly, the center's director.

The new equipment costs roughly \$125,000. Penrickton got the system in September, and it is the largest of its kind in the world, Sebaly said.

The center serves children who are blind and have at least one other disability. Services are free for the 25 kids who live there during the week and the five children who visit during the day.

There's a dance therapist, a music therapist, an occupational therapist, nurses and a social worker.

In 1952, three Taylor families - the Penmans, Rickers and Wiggintons - founded the center after having trouble finding help for their children who were blind. The center's name, Penrickton, was formed from their surnames.

Today, the 20,000-square-foot facility serves kids ages 1-12 from around the state and Ohio. Therapy is tailored to each child's needs. The center is not a school. Many of the kids are bused to public school during the day.

Penrickton takes no government funds, Sebaly said. Service organizations, churches, schools and bars donate money and goods.

Michigan Report

December 5, 2005

WAYNE STATE REMOVES MINIMUM WAGE SITE

Admitting the university “probably screwed up,” the Wayne State University Labor Studies Center took down on Monday a Website advocating the approval of a ballot proposal to increase the minimum wage. The action came after the Michigan Chamber of Commerce filed a complaint Friday alleging a campaign financing law violation because public institutions are barred from using public funds for express advocacy activities.

Hal Stack, director of the Labor Studies Center, said the site was developed outside university control by Michigan State University students who were working on an internship on public policy and saw the site as a way to highlight the issue and answer questions regarding the minimum wage.

Mr. Stack said that an aide, “probably with the best of intentions” and noting the site did not deal with political candidates, gave approval to host the site as part of the center’s Web presence.

“We made a mistake. The Chamber is correct that it should not have been on our Website,” he said. Mr. Stack said the site went up in late September and was due to come down at the end of the term, which ends this week.

Sunday letter: Pay a living wage

Midland Daily News

December 4, 2005

To the editor:

It would seem that a minimum wage should give enough pay to buy food, pay the rent, pay the utilities and support a car (to get to work). One would hope also to have some health care and, ultimately, put some aside for retirement. If one is married, then rent is only half for each person but the rest is the same, until there are children, then a minimum wage that is a living wage will require a bit more pay – or should it be illegal for them? If you're poor and get pregnant, I suppose then we would ask you to get an abortion?

If one can't make a living on the minimum wage then one has to go on welfare. Welfare will provide the above basics (except no retirement fund). On welfare one can have children. Thus if one doesn't like the welfare system and thinks the abuse of the system must stop, one needs to provide an incentive to work.

There are a couple of ways to change the welfare system. One way is to stop welfare (if you don't work, you will starve and so will your children), and if you can't find someone to hire you, then you starve.

The second idea is one could pay a living wage as the minimum wage. It would entice people to work. We hear about the jobs Americans won't do. Would you work at a job that pays less than you need to live, if welfare is the other option? Just like above, you still need to find a job but with a living wage you get serious about doing so, since it is actually a chance to change things for the better.

It would seem that paying a living wage would reduce the number of people on welfare. So then why do the same politicians who denounce the welfare system vote down an increase in the minimum wage that would make it come closer to a living wage? If you think voting down an increase in the minimum wage is stupid, tell them so.

Jerome Klosowski

Bay City

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Reader Opinions:

Richard Crampton Dec, 04 2005

I saw a bumper sticker that was quite interesting. It said to think globally, act locally. We must look at Dave Camp our Congressman who represents big business instead of us. Do we want to continue on the same path of losing health care and jobs and retirement benefits. Having wages cut while the cost of everything rises. Then we need a change "Anybody but Camp" shall be the cry for a better America.

William Bohnow Dec, 04 2005

In order to raise the minimum wage, you FIRST have to have representatives that REALLY represent you and not business groups that contribute to their political war chests. If you have been following the political shenanigans coming out of Washington, then you know how many of our congressmen and senators are under suspicion of accepting money from questionable sources. Michigan has its share of politicians who fit this category. When the business world unlocks its wallets and pours mountains of money on the fire, how can you expect low income families to stand a chance of rising with the Phoenix to a better life. You and I no longer have the ability to steer our representatives to make the decisions that are most important to us. Other than voting AGAINST those who are in office and hoping that someone new will read the message on the wall, only an extremely high poll number will ever sway congress's decisions on this issue and so far this issue has not risen high enough on the list of immediate issues.

Progress against poverty doubted

Sunday, December 04, 2005

By Brad Flory
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Maybe the poor are not getting poorer. At least not in Jackson County.

Poverty estimates released last week show significant improvement since 1993, progress that held up even after the county's economy turned sluggish at the start of this decade.

In 2003, the most recent year with statistics, 10.9 percent of county residents lived in poverty, according to Census Bureau estimates. Ten years earlier, 14.2 percent lived in poverty.

The drop of 3.3 percentage points means about 5,200 fewer people living in poverty -- a 23 percent cut in the county's poverty rate since 1993.

People who work with the poor are skeptical.

"We haven't seen any downturn," said Virginia Fetterman, director of social services for the Salvation Army in Jackson.

"Last month we did 100 more food baskets than the same month last year," Fetterman said.

"Those are 100 more families who need food. So you can't tell me we're down."

Kitrina Sims, client advocate and shelter manager at the Interfaith Shelter, said government poverty figures do not accurately reflect a growing segment of working poor.

"I think there are many more working poor here, due to the way the economy is," she said. "A lot of people are just a paycheck away from homelessness, or possible homelessness."

Kate Martin, director of planning and community development for the Community Action Agency in Jackson, draws a distinction between what she calls "official poverty" and real poverty.

An outdated government formula used to set the poverty line tends to drive down official poverty numbers across the nation, Martin said.

"You have a lot of people who have trouble making ends meet, but they no longer qualify as poverty," she said.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services sets the current poverty line at \$19,350 for a family of four.

Even if statistical methods artificially flatten poverty rates everywhere, the census figures still suggest Jackson County has done comparatively well.

Jackson County's poverty rate was lower than the nationwide rate every year between 1993 and 2003 and it fell more sharply than the national rate during that decade.

In 2003, Jackson County's poverty rate fell below the state rate, 11 percent, for the first time since 1995. Over the same period, Jackson County's economy was far from robust.

Median household income in Jackson County between 1993 and 2003 barely outpaced inflation. By comparison, median income for both the state and nation rose much faster.

So what is the explanation for lower poverty rates?

Martin said more working poor may also mean fewer people in deep poverty.

"Wages get you out of official poverty," she said.

Jackson County's unemployment rate more than doubled between 2000 and 2003. The number of meals served at the Interfaith Shelter jumped from 59,413 in 2001 to 71,237 in 2002, according to Sims. This year, the shelter will serve more than 76,000 meals, Sims said.

Fetterman said Jackson County clearly has more needy people today than it did in 2003, the year covered by the new Census Bureau statistics.

The Salvation Army distributed 510 food baskets last month, compared to 419 in the same month last year and 305 in 2003, Fetterman said.

"Two years ago it wasn't as bad as it is now. That's for sure," she said.

Santa Claus Girls benefit from love that lives on

Tuesday, December 06, 2005

By Matt Vande Bunte
The Grand Rapids Press

It has been four years since Patrice McDowell lost her son in an automobile accident, four holiday seasons gone by without her giving him a present.

But a child somewhere in Kent County will get a gift this month from the Plainfield Township woman -- just like each of the previous four Decembers. McDowell has made a tradition of donating money to Santa Claus Girls in honor of her son, Jeremy Waranica.

"Seeing ads, it just breaks your heart all over again," McDowell said. "By donating to the Santa Claus Girls, the joy that he will no longer experience with the gifts I can't give him anymore, someone else will.

"It helps heal your heart a little bit."

It was a Monday afternoon in August 2001 when 21-year-old Jeremy was driving to his grandfather's house to mow the lawn. His car ran into the back of a van stopped at Four Mile Road NE and Coit Avenue.

McDowell said her son was on medication for seizures, and "our best guess is that he had one driving." After five hours of surgery, Waranica died at Spectrum Health Butterworth Campus. While her son never can be replaced, McDowell said "that doesn't mean that my love for him can't bring joy to others."

That's what Jeremy tried to do during his life by donating money to Santa Claus Girls.

This year, McDowell made a second contribution to the Press-sponsored charity -- this one in honor of her own dad. Harry Waranica, the grandfather whose lawn Jeremy Waranica never got to mow that summer day four years ago, passed away in September at age 79.

McDowell said the mission of Santa Claus Girls makes a fitting tribute to a man whose hard work "always provided us with Christmas over the years."

"My dad was the ultimate caretaker," McDowell said. "It's an opportunity for me to pass along what my father passed to me."

Santa Claus Girls delivers gifts to needy children ages six months to 12 years, whose names are provided by the **state Department of Human Services**. Other low-income families with children who wish to receive Santa Claus Girls gifts may call 447-9405 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Gift delivery is scheduled for Dec. 17, and 350 volunteer drivers are needed to deliver gifts in Kent County.

Cash donations will be accepted throughout the holiday season. Mail them to Santa Claus Girls, c/o The Grand Rapids Press, 155 Michigan St. NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Names of contributors will appear in The Press, so please double check for correct spellings.

To contribute by credit card, call 222-5796 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays.

Old Newsboys need our help to reach goal

*Group must raise \$70,000 to give 1,500 children a Christmas
The first stage of this year's Old Newsboys campaign is finished. The
overall effort to help needy children continues.*

Dedicated volunteers hit the streets last weekend. They hawked a special edition of the *Times Herald* for donations to this worthy annual cause. Each year, the Old Newsboys raise money for socks, boots, shoes and underwear for children of our community who cannot afford them. The goal is \$70,000. With it, the group hopes to help 1,500 children. The newspaper donations were a start. The weekend effort brought in \$11,783.27. Added to other contributions, the total after the newspaper drive was \$30,098.

Nearly \$40,000 still must be raised. The good news is the Old Newsboys still have three weeks.

This campaign faces a special challenge. Hard times continue to plague our community. Joblessness and poverty are taking a terrible toll.

These factors mean some of our friends and neighbors are unable to give. That makes it all the more vital those who can make a donation must do so.

Times Herald Circulation Director Don Laske is the Old Newsboys secretary. He knows firsthand how tough meeting the \$70,000 goal could be this year.

"We realize we're down slightly," he said. "But we remain very optimistic the community's going to support the Old Newsboys in achieving our goal."

The group has 1,500 children in its sights this year. It hopes this community will take all of them into its heart.

Originally published December 6, 2005

United Way hopes to reach \$3.3M goal

Tuesday, December 06, 2005

By Pat Rombyer

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The United Way of Jackson County has met less than 70 percent of its \$3.3 million fall fund-raising target, but officials believe they'll hit their goal by the end of January.

So far, pledges are at \$2,267,757. The shortfall is not unusual. Campaign goals often are met weeks after the end of the fall fund-raising period, said Ken Toll, the United Way's executive director.

"We're ahead of where we were last year," Toll said. "So we're optimistic that we will go over \$3 million."

Last year at this time the agency had collected \$2,253,824, about 75 percent of the 2004 goal of \$3 million.

Some workplace campaigns are ongoing. United Way also mails solicitations to retirees and others who may not have the opportunity to contribute at work. Toll said the \$3.3 million goal includes \$640,000 in anticipated grants. Some grants have been denied, so new applications are being written.

United Way officials said they knew they faced a challenge when they raised the goal to \$3.3 million -- a 10 percent increase over last year to meet community needs.

Then Hurricane Katrina hit, and fund-raising drives to help its victims contributed to a falloff in anticipated donations to the United Way and other charities.

All money raised in excess of \$3 million is earmarked for the United Way's Success by Six program, which prepares young children for school.

Volunteers knit one, purl two to make thousands of gifts

Tuesday, December 06, 2005

By Teresa Taylor Williams

CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The cookies sat on Christmas plates hardly touched, and pinkies weren't raised on cups at Volunteer Muskegon's Helping Hands Tea last week.

Instead, the guests turned it into a work bee.

Neatly displayed on tables were the group's knitting, crochet and sewing handiwork, along with copies of patterns to take for those who were interested in trying to make a fuzzy scarf, a small multicolored quilt or baby booties.

More than 50 volunteers comprise Helping Hands, which evolved five years ago out of Volunteer Muskegon's Retired Senior Volunteer Program.

Since January, the women have created more than 2,000 items. Each year, Volunteer Muskegon surveys the needs of the area, and the items are distributed to Michigan Department of Human Services, Love Inc., Child Haven, Project Linus, Every Woman's Place, the Muskegon Rescue Mission, hospitals and nursing homes.

Cleo Dill and Mary Weimer, both of Fruitport, joined the group within the last couple months. Both learned to knit when they were small, and thought Volunteer Muskegon was a good outlet for their made-with-love creations.

"I like to make baby stuff. I'm a grandma and (the children) grow up too fast," said Dill, who knits with others at a local senior center. "So I've got to make baby stuff for other people's babies."

Weimer, who enjoys showing young people who to knit at Wolf Lake Baptist Church, is re-discovering her love for the craft.

For years her needles and yarn sat untouched as she raised a family. But seven years ago she picked them up and said it was as if she'd never stopped. She also taught herself to crochet this year.

"I've been on crutches the last five years, so I have a lot of spare time," she said.

The tea seemed to serve as a break from knitting, crocheting or sewing. Instead, there were several stations where they could learn a new craft; most opted to learn how to embroider Christmas designs on stationery.

Ruth Ann Blair of Norton Shores has worked with the group since it began five years ago. She enjoys knitting hats for cancer patients out of super-soft yarn.

Blair, who is retired, has been knitting for more than 50 years. She taught herself out of a book when she was in high school.

"I can't just sit and watch TV. If my fingers are busy, it keeps me from eating too much," she said with a smile.

She wore a lime-colored vest, one of her creations made of "eyelash yarn" that is soft and wispy. She enjoys getting special patterns and yarns from the Internet. "A lot of times I make things, then give them away. I like doing it because I'm helping."

Volunteer Muskegon's RSVP Coordinator Kerri Roberts enjoys needlework in her spare time, and said working with the Helping Hands volunteers spurred her to begin crocheting.

"The program is so great because you know that scarves and blankets are going to someone, they will be used to keep someone warm," said Roberts.

Volunteer Muskegon has a small room reserved solely for donations from the public for the Helping Hands crew. The shelves are lined with all kinds of yarn and material.

Roberts credits volunteers such as Della Gzym as being especially talented.

"Our volunteers take some material or yarn and will come back and make such pretty things even out of not-so-pretty stuff," said Roberts.

Gzym, who said she doesn't get out much due to her health, said being involved with Helping Hands the past five years helps keep her busy. She favors creating lap robes and slippers. She made between 70-80 pairs of slippers this year.

"It keeps me busy. I work with the yarn that no one else really wants, and I hope people like the unusual stuff that I make," said Gzym. "It's a shame to waste all that yarn."

Fill the needs of the season

Tuesday, December 06, 2005

Saginaw News Editorial

For 20 years, the greater Saginaw community has brought brightness and cheer to the less fortunate through their generous donations to the Holiday Wish List.

With the giving hearts that are a crucial part of the spirit of the season, valley residents buy coats and boots, meals, games and toys to fill the requests of families and individuals.

The group is again asking residents to fulfill requests with donations through this Friday. The gift requests aren't extravagant -- most ask for basics such as clothes and food -- yet the joy they spread are enormous.

For example:

t A diabetic man simply asks for food and a winter coat.

t A family with medical bills from a child's cancer treatment asks for boots, shoes, dolls and other toys for their four children.

t A single mother with two pre-teen girls requests clothing, costume jewelry and games.

A grandmother raising three granddaughters wants food, clothes and educational games.

Those are representative of the more than 800 requests as the United Way of Saginaw County Volunteer Services and the **Family Independence Agency of Saginaw County** team up for the 2005 Holiday Wish List. Volunteers match donors with families in need or accept cash donations to fill the wishes for them. The Wish List volunteers also work with other area charities and groups to coordinate the holiday gift-giving.

Saginaw News readers received a list of some of the requests, including those above, in the Wednesday, Nov. 23 paper. If the Wish List supplement got lost among the scores of ads with holiday deals, pick up a copy at our offices downtown, 203 S. Washington.

Easier yet, call the Wish List phone line at (989) 755-8855, and they'll help match your gift with a deserving family.

Unsure of what to give? Send a donation to United Way of Saginaw County, Holiday Wish List Program, 100 S. Jefferson, Third Floor, Saginaw MI 48607.

But don't delay. The Wish List hotline will take your calls through 5 p.m. Friday. The needs are great this year. Call now. Find out how you can make the holidays brighter for families in need.

A little holiday giving can improve a lot of lives year 'round

Royal Oak Daily Tribune

PUBLISHED: December 5, 2005

It's a week into December, the month that brings a frenzy of Christmas anticipation, and Give-A-Christmas Year Around is moving toward its goal of raising \$80,000 for local charities.

The Judson Center, HAVEN, Troy People Concerned, the South Oakland Shelter, Community Services of Oakland, the Boys and Girls Club of South Oakland County, South Oakland YMCA, Common Ground Sanctuary and the Salvation Army will all get a piece of 2005 Give-A-Christmas funds.

They'll use the money in myriad ways to help the homeless, abused women and children, abandoned or foster children, people with emotional or mental impairment, low-income families, even those who've temporarily fallen on hard economic times and need help to get back on their feet.

Your donation will buy things for the needy that comfortable families don't think twice about.

Donations could help the Salvation Army buy turkeys for holiday meals, Troy People Concerned pay heat bills and rent for single mothers, South Oakland Shelter buy prescriptions for senior citizens, and by the HAVEN to buy meals.

The YMCA will send kids to camp, Common Ground will bring people back from the brink, and the Boys and Girls Club will run programs that help raise the kind of kids that south Oakland County will be proud of.

Give-A-Christmas organizations are all local agencies that help people in this area. Since there are no administrative costs, donations go to the people who need it most.

We would be happy to announce your contributions, along with your city of residence and a greeting or memory.

Checks should be made to "Give-A-Christmas Year Around" and sent to:

Give-A-Christmas

c/o Daily Tribune

210 E. Third Street

Royal Oak, MI 48067

Until the end of the year, we'll bring readers stories of Give-A-Christmas' generous donors, along with the agencies and people helped by the charity.

We hope the tales warm hearts this holiday season and spur action on behalf of those who need it the most.

Recent contributions include:

* Rene and Jim Daniels, Royal Oak, \$20: "In memory of our loved ones."

* Don and Marla Heberer, Clawson, \$50: "Many blessings for all our friends and relatives during this holiday time."

* Don and Judith Breseman, Royal Oak, \$25.

* Loretta Whitson, Berkley, \$50: "In memory of loved ones."

* From our "Advent-by-Candlelight," St. Mary's Women's Guild, Royal Oak, \$228.25: "To help people in need."

* Mary Ellen Springstead, Royal Oak, \$25: "In memory of my husband, Robert Springstead."

Firefighters kick off Toys for Tots drive

News Update

OWOSSO

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, December 06, 2005

By Linda Angelo

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OWOSSO- The Owosso firefighters and the U.S. Marine Corp. Reserve are looking for people to help them fill the fire safety house with toys.

A Toys for Tots drive will kick off at 2 p.m. Friday at Tim Hortons, 323 W. Main St., and end Saturday. People can bring new unwrapped toys and have their child's picture taken with Santa for free from 4-8 p.m. Friday.

Firefighters plan to staff the fire safety house non stop until it is filled with toys.

Details: Fire Capt. Chris Hawn at (989) 725-0594.

Stryker's gift to Goodwill: a new spot for headquarters

Tuesday, December 6, 2005

ajones@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8556

Stryker Corp.'s one-time corporate headquarters at 420 Alcott St. will become a headquarters again: that of Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan.

Stryker, a Kalamazoo-based Fortune 500 medical-products company that is spending \$81 million to expand here, closed on an agreement Thursday to donate its 88,000-square-foot Alcott Street building to Goodwill. The facility is on the city's near-south side in the Edison neighborhood between Portage Street and Burdick Street.

"What it means is, we've got the opportunity to be where the people we serve are," said John Dillworth, president and chief executive officer of Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan. "Forty percent of the people we serve live in the Edison neighborhood."

He said having a facility in Edison puts some of those people within walking distance.

The estimated value of the donation has not been disclosed.

Until last week, the building was part of Stryker's Medical Division, which produces hospital beds and stretchers for emergency medical transport.

Goodwill, which specializes in providing training and employment services for those in need, has been located at 2700 N. Pitcher St. since 1957. It hopes to sell that 57,000-square-foot location soon and start making a transition into the Alcott Street building by mid-January.

Dillworth said growing demand -- a nearly 300 percent increase in the number of people needing assistance -- had strained Goodwill's current facility and necessitated the transition.

"Where we are currently, basically in Parchment, car or bus is the only transportation," he said.

"Being in the (Edison) neighborhood," Dillworth said, "we'll be within walking distance of Michigan Works. We'll be within walking distance of the (Michigan) Department of Human Services."

He said the new location gives Goodwill 30,000 additional square feet of space that it will use in part to consolidate some of its human services -- such as its English-as-a-second-language program and the adult-education program it conducts in conjunction with Kalamazoo Public Schools. Those are currently operated on South Street in downtown Kalamazoo.

J. Patrick Anderson, vice president of strategy and communications for Stryker, said Goodwill asked the company whether it would be willing to donate the facility two years ago after Stryker announced plans to consolidate its two local medical-products operations.

Dillworth said he suggested to Stryker Chairman John W. Brown that donating the building might be the most financially rewarding thing Stryker could do with the Alcott building.

"It's a really nice anniversary present," Dillworth said.

Goodwill will celebrate its 50th anniversary here in 2006.